

# THE ST. FU. NEWS

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ISSUED BY  
SOUTHERN TENANT FARMERS UNION  
Box 5215, Memphis, Tenn.

## OKLAHOMA CONVENTION FAVORS WITHDRAWAL FROM UCAPAWA!

Unanimous Resolution Recommends Direct

Affiliation with the CIO  
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500 Present at 2nd Annual State Convention  
Held at Muskogee

With the enthusiastic singing of "We Shall Not Be Moved", the second annual state convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union of Oklahoma was called to order in Muskogee on April 23rd by Tom Ferry of Creek County. Five hundred sharecroppers and tenant farmers listened to reports by Odus Sweden, State Secretary of the Union, the WPA Director of Reemployment for Oklahoma, and a representative of Governor Marland. The convention deliberated throughout the day on the problems of tenantry.

Most important action taken was the unanimous endorsement of a resolution demanding that all charters for locals be issued by the STFU, and that all membership books bear the seal and emblem of the STFU and its program. The resolution further demanded that unless the STFU's identity as a union for sharecroppers, tenants and day laborers was protected the STFU withdraw affiliation from the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America. The convention went on record in favor of applying for direct affiliation with the CIO. The resolution was addressed to the National Executive Council of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union.

Among other resolutions passed was one of strong opposition to the war plans of the government. The convention condemned the spending of millions of dollars to build battleships. It endorsed all efforts of peace organizations to keep America out of war and authorized the sending of a representative to the National Anti-War Congress in Washington.

### Union Gains Relief Victory

Following a sympathetic speech by Mr. Conley, State WPA Director of Reemployment, a committee of sharecroppers met with him and Miss Dewitt, State Social Worker, to investigate 150 cases of discrimination against Union members who sought relief. Following the conference, over one-half of the cases discussed were promised relief by Mr. Conley. This was hailed by all as a great victory in the progress of the Union and a sign of its accepted prestige in the eyes of the Government.

### Educational Program Mapped

In the afternoon an educational conference was held for all Presidents and Secretaries of locals who were present. H. L. Mitchell, National Executive Secretary and P. H. Benson, educational worker from the Memphis office outlined the work of the Educational Committees in the locals. (1) These Committees in the locals circulate literature sent out by the National Office. (2) They take active steps to organize adult education classes and to find unemployed teachers to hold these classes. (3) The local committees plan forums with people to speak on the program of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. Mr. Simmons, WPA teacher in the Union stated that the educational classes were very helpful in keeping up the interest of the members in the Union. He also recommended serving refreshments at educational meetings.

### New Slate Elected

The following were unanimously elected members of the Oklahoma State Executive Committee for the coming year: C. H. Ashley, W. L. Blackstone, James Brown, Lawrence Burr, Tom Ferry, Ezra Ore, Henry Pippin, and Reverend Purcell. The President elected for the state was Henry Pippin.



STFU EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETS

PROBLEMS PRESENTED TO  
UCAFAWA BOARD

A special session of the Executive Council of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union was held in Memphis on April 25th. This meeting authorized representatives of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union who are members of the Executive Board of the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing and Allied Workers of America to present a resolution asking for clarification of the status of the STFU within the International.

The action was authorized following the adoption of a resolution by the Oklahoma State Convention of the STFU. (See first page) and the demands of many locals in other states, some of which have refused to accept affiliation with the Cannery and Agricultural Workers International, due to the fact that they believe that the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, its program and identity as an organization, might be destroyed.

Following the session of the Executive Council of the STFU, J. R. Butler, O. H. Whitfield, Odis L. Sweeden, H. L. Mitchell, Howard Kester and Evelyn Smith left for Washington to attend a meeting of the International Executive Board on the 27th, 28th and 29th of April.

J. R. Butler and H. L. Mitchell, speaking on behalf of the STFU delegation presented the resolution and recounted the difficulties that had arisen since affiliation with UCAFAWA. They requested clarification of the status of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. They requested that the International grant the STFU a charter and the responsibility of organizing all sharecroppers, tenants and farm laborers in the Southern states. They pointed out that the program and the policies of the STFU have been developed over a period of years and have met the needs of the people as no other organization in this field has ever done. They further stated that the confusion arising from the fact that members of the union actually belong to two unions under the present arrangements and are required to make reports, etc. to two organizations is interfering with the organizational work of the STFU and that unless provision was made for retaining the name and identity of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the appeal it had among the people that the labor movement in the South would be weakened. It was pointed out that through the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, with its program developed by the workers themselves, there was an instrument whereby the masses of workers in the cotton fields of the South might secure the benefits of labor organization.

The resolution asked that the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union be allowed to issue its own charters and membership books and retain its name and identity as an organization within the International.

A counter-proposal was advanced by Donald Henderson, General President of the International. This proposal was that the STFU become a restricted district, and limit its organization to the states of Arkansas, Oklahoma and Missouri. This proposal was referred to the Executive Council of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and will be discussed at the next session about June 1st.

The session of the International Board devoted to a discussion of the STFU proposal was attended by Mr. John Brophy, National Director of the CIO. Just prior to the arrival of Mr. Brophy a motion was adopted to bar all persons not executive board members or office workers of the International. This motion was obviously aimed at Howard Kester as he and Evelyn Smith were the only persons present who did not come within the limits of the motion.

Howard Kester afterwards stated, "This isn't the first time a member of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union has been evicted. All of us are accustomed to being ordered out of meetings by Arkansas cotton planters, but I hardly expected to be asked to leave a meeting of the International Executive Board just before matters of vital importance to all members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union were introduced, especially since I am an officer and member in good standing of the organization which constitutes the most significant group affiliated with the Agricultural Workers' International."



The STFU delegates voiced the loyalty of the members of the STFU to the principles of Industrial Unionism and the desire of the Union to remain within the ranks of the CIO on a basis that would make it possible for the work of organizing the workers on the southern cotton plantations to go forward.

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Teacher:- "If the landlord lends you twenty dollars, and you pay him back five dollars a month, how much will you owe him after three months?"

Bright Pupil:"Twenty dollars!"

Teacher: "You don't understand arithmetic!"

Bright pupil:" You don't understand our landlord!"

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#### UNION ADVANCES LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM IN ARKANSAS

##### Demands Enforcement of Legal Rights

At the request of news agencies in Arkansas the STFU recently issued a statement regarding the primary elections to be held in August. It stated that altho' the STFU as an organization does not participate in politics, its members as individuals are vitally interested and will question all candidates for county and state office on matters which effect their well-being.

Members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union will demand to know whether the next Chief Executive Officer of Arkansas will use his power and influence to protect the right of our people to organize and to peaceably assemble in their meetings, and further, if the Governor will enforce these civil liberties when the local officers refuse to act.

Members of the union want to know if the Governor and candidates for the state legislature will vote for and support the following:

1. Repeal of the "Interference with Labor Act" which is used solely against active union members and organizers whose cases are always dismissed upon appeal to a higher court. This measure is clearly unconstitutional.
2. Repeal of the Poll Tax Law which in 1936 disfranchised all but 16% of the voting population of the state.
3. Enact a measure that will abolish the plantation commissary system and the use of doodlum books and other forms of counterfeit money.
4. Repeal the Sales Tax law and substitute a measure which will place this burden of taxation on those able to pay and not penalize those least able to pay.
5. Increase appropriation for educational funds and old age pensions and administer such funds without discrimination against Negroes and union members.

In addition to the above members of the STFU will want to know from candidates for county sheriff whether or not they will discontinue the widespread practice of granting deputy sheriffs' commissions to plantation gunmen, riding bosses and other retainers of the plantation owners.

Members will vote as individuals. They are bound by no orders from their organization.



## EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM PUSHED IN THE UNION

### Additional Worker Placed in Field to Aid in Setting up Classes

Always active in assisting the sharecropper in his rise to freedom, the Executive Officers of the STFU are expanding the educational work. The program is intended to offset the deplorable inadequacy of rural education and to promote a better understanding among members of what the STFU is and does.

Following the holding of two national institutes for study in past months, the STFU will now concentrate its attention upon setting up classes in the locals. Odus Sweeden, Executive Secretary of the Oklahoma State Committee states that already there are seventeen WPA teachers holding classes for Oklahoma locals, and that in a short time he hopes to have fifty teachers assigned to the educational work of the union. He has found the WPA officials in Washington and Oklahoma very cooperative in putting on teachers requested by the STFU.

### Staff Increased

The educational staff has been increased with the addition of Purnell Benson, graduate student from the University of Chicago. His home is in Berlin, Maryland. He has spent much of his life on a farm and has made a special study of rural labor problems in the South. His work in the STFU will be to aid the locals in organizing their classes and obtaining teachers.

The STFU has been able to secure the services of Purnell Benson through the generosity of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, religious organization dedicated to the promotion of peaceful, non-violent ways of doing things. He will give courses and speak to locals on methods of preventing violence in labor disputes. He will organize pacifist groups in addition to his work for the STFU.

### Locals Set Up Educational Committees

Ward Rodgers, Educational Director, has sent a notice to all locals to elect their educational committees without further delay. These committees will have the important responsibility of advancing the work of education in each local.

The success of the struggle of sharecroppers to lift themselves from their condition of illiteracy and ignorance will depend upon the energy and faithfulness of these committees. All members are urged to get behind their local committees and help them set up classes at once. Members want to learn how to keep records of their dealings with landlords so they will not be cheated. They want to learn how to write good letters. They want to be able to read accurately all the material published by the STFU or about the STFU. The STFU is their union and they demand a chance to learn more of what the STFU is doing to improve their condition.

The procedure for getting WPA teachers is as follows: (1) Find unemployed men or women who have had teaching experience and who are eligible for relief. (2) Have them write to the Director of Adult Education under the WPA in the state for application blanks. (3) Have them certified for relief by the County Department of Public Welfare. (4) Have the application blanks OK'd by a local superintendent or principal of a school. (5) Send the application to the Director of Adult Education under the WPA in the state. If you don't get any action, or if the County Board refuses to certify an unemployed person for relief, or if no one will OK the application blank, write to the National Office of the STFU in Memphis and they will take the matter up in Washington. Remember that the person making application must be eligible for relief and must be certified before their application can be considered.

Educational committees in the locals will plan interesting and enjoyable programs for members and friends of the union. Once in a while a public forum can be held which will be sure to be fun for all. One speaker should be selected to talk for the STFU and its program and another speaker, not yet won to the union, should take the other side. The general public should be invited. The fun begins when the two speakers test each other's wit and skill in discussing why the STFU offers the only real hope sharecroppers have. Refreshments will add to the attraction of these gatherings.



The local committees will also plan picnics, ballgames, and outings for the members. With summer coming on, the opportunities for friendly get-togethers are frequent.

#### GOVERNMENT TO CRACK DOWN ON UNFAIR PLANTERS

##### Ruling Represents Another Victory For The STFU

The government will refuse to pay benefits to planters who chisel on cotton contracts with sharecroppers and tenants in 1938 according to a statement issued in Washington May 3rd. I. W. Duggan of the U. S. Department of Agriculture in charge of the AAA cotton division issued orders to county committeemen to refuse to accept contracts if the sharecroppers' or tenants' share in the crop is less than what they usually receive.

The above ruling was made following action by the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union. H. L. Mitchell, Secretary of the STFU brought the attention of Washington authorities to the widespread distribution of a model contract throughout the Delta which provided for reductions in the share of sharecroppers and tenants in the 1938 crop to 40 and 60 percent of the crop. Customs of the country are that the sharecropper who furnishes his labor and that of his family shall receive one half of the proceeds of the crop, subject of course to all deductions for advances made during the year. The tenant who furnishes his tools and stock receives three-fourths of the proceeds.

The attempt to reduce the share of the cropper to 40 per cent and that of the tenant to 60 percent was described by Mitchell in a telegram to Secretary Wallace as an "Attempt by Planters to circumvent the provisions of the 1938 cotton control measure" which provides this year that the tenants and sharecroppers shall receive benefit payments on the same basis as they share in the crop.

The sharecroppers and tenants of the South are indebted to the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union for protecting them in this case as well as for the provision in the law which requires direct payment to them for their proper share in the crop benefits. However, unless all such workers are united into a union they stand a poor chance of securing the share of government money that belongs to them in 1938.

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#### EARLE FLOGGERS TO BE BROUGHT TO JUSTICE

##### Must Face Trial in U.S. District Court

The first round in the battle to convict the floggers of Jim Reese, Eliza Nolden and Willie Sue Blagden was won by C. A. Stanfield, attorney for the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, on May 3rd. The defense lawyers Denver Dudley of Jonesboro and Sam Costen of Memphis had entered a plea for a dismissal of the suits for damages filed against their clients "Boss" Dulaney, H. S. Watson, Earle Cherry, Ernest Richards, Tommie Thompson, Percy Magnus and L. L. Barham, all prominent planters of Earle, Arkansas. Judge Trimble of the United States District Court denied their plea and ordered the defense to prepare an answer to the complaints to be filed within thirty days, and set the date of the trial for the November term of the Federal Court.

These cases are civil suits for damages and total \$45,000. They grew out of an attack on a union picket line near the town of Earle during the cotton choppers strike in the Spring of 1936. The picket line was led by Jim Reese, white sharecropper leader, and Frank Weems, Negro union member. They were badly beaten with axhandles and baseball bats by the mob of planters. This attack was reenacted by the "March of Time" in a newsreel.

Following this attack on the picket line and the disappearance of Frank Weems, Willie Sue Blagden, a Memphis Social Workers, and Claude Williams,



were flogged by the same men when they attempted to investigate the attack on the union members.

Jim Reese is now living and working on a farm in Mississippi. Eliza Nolden, aged Negro woman, is in a hospital now near the point of death due possibly to the brutal beating she received on that day in June.

The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union has won many victories since these attacks were made upon union members. Public meetings are now held in Crittenden County without interference. Paul D. Peacher has been convicted of Peonage. All know that the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union is responsible for the many improvements in living conditions among the organized workers on cotton plantations in Eastern Arkansas.

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#### ARKANSAS TO VOTE ON REPEAL OF POLL TAX

A proposed constitutional amendment which if adopted would repeal the poll tax law in Arkansas has been submitted by the last session of the Arkansas State Legislature, according to C. A. Stanfield, Attorney for the STFU. The amendment will be voted on in the general election on November 2nd, 1938. Members of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union who wish to qualify to vote in this general election will have to pay their poll tax and get a receipt prior to July 15th. This is an opportunity to get rid of the Poll Tax which disfranchises 85 percent of the citizens in Arkansas who are otherwise qualified to vote.

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#### E D I T O R I A L

We raise cotton to clothe half the world. We don't have a shirt on our back that isn't patched and torn.

We live on the richest farming soil in the country, but we eat fodder fit for mules--corn meal and old sow belly when we can get it.

The landlords and the banks make billions of dollars from the crops we grow. We starve in miserable poverty, the lowest paid workers in the world.

The A.A.A. pays out billions of dollars to cotton planters who kick us off the place.

The government spends billions of dollars for guns and bombs to destroy innocent lives in war while we cannot even get a few groceries for relief.

Are we going to live forever in subjection while a few live in luxury? Will our children and our grandchildren suffer as we have suffered and toil as we have toiled? Are we and our families going to be ground down to dust by the vicious sharecropping system?

In the Union there is hope. People said it couldn't be done. But the Southern Tenant Farmers organized. A reign of gangster terror, floggings and shootings could not keep the sharecroppers from rising against the system which oppressed them. In four years the Union has swelled to 40,000 strong.

How much larger will it grow? There are two million tenant farmers in the South. The sky is the limit. We are going to build a big union. And we are going to build a strong union. Our slogan is "Land for the Landless!" We are going to abolish tenantry or perish in the attempt!

What can one man alone do against starvation and sickness, against guns and whips? But when each has the strength of thousands he has the strength of Samson.



We need the Union. The Union needs us. If we are one of those who has not joined, let us do so at once!

The dues are the life blood of the Union. If we cannot pay up all our back dues, let us pay up some of them. Every dime, every nickel, every penny means that much more to ransom our freedom.

Who are we, whose fathers and grandfathers made America, to be dound lagging when the call for help goes out? Who are we farmers, the backbone of the nation, to have the spines of jellyfish when we are challenged by the struggle for a better life?

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#### BUTLER AND MITCHELL CONFER WITH JOHN L. LEWIS

##### CIO Chief Greet's Union

In a conference with John L. Lewis, Chairman of the Committee for Industrial Organization and President of the powerful United Mine Workers of America, J. R. Butler and H. L. Mitchell were requested by Mr. Lewis to extend his greetings to the membership of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and to assure them that the CIO was ready to give all support possible to the efforts of southern sharecroppers and tenant farmers to organize.

Mr. Lewis spoke admiringly of the work done by the STFU and stated that he and the CIO wanted to do whatever the membership of the STFU felt would serve their best interests.

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A union member had been arrested on charges of interfering with labor.

"Aren't you going to hire a lawyer to defend you, John,?" asked a friend shortly before the trial.

"No, said John, "It'll be all I can do to pay my fine, let alone paying a lawyers fee besides."

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#### WOODRUFF COUNTY PRAISES GRIFFIN

We have been asked to print the following resolution honoring Brother D. A. Griffin, passed by the Woodruff Arkansas County Central Council, April 2nd, 1938.

We the County Central Council of the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union resolve that this council express by standing vote our appreciation of the sacrifice and unselfish labors of our own brother D. A. Griffin, in the interest of our cause, realizing that it means much to be absent from home and family in the interest of others. We feel we should honor him to whom honor is due. May he at all times have our wholehearted support.

(signed) S. W. Henard, President  
Ernest Williams, Secretary